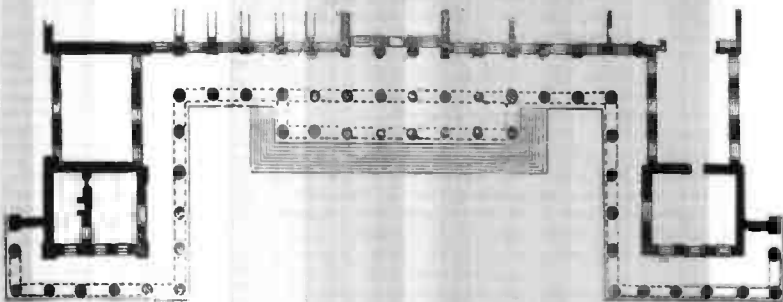




PLAN OF THE FACADE OF THE BRITISH MUSEUM.

THE BUILDER,

NO. XL.

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 11, 1843.

THE BRITISH MUSEUM.

SIR ROBERT SMIRKE'S conduct in this business leaves him with scarcely one to defend him; like many indiscreet and perverse persons, he imposes too much upon his friends, and involves them in backing and apologies which a little proper consideration on his part would most agreeably spare them from. The public, if we are to judge from what is said by all its organs, by every authority on matters of art, have well-nigh lost all patience, and are abandoning themselves to the extreme of chagrin and disappointment; and truly, if we are to view the Plan before us, with a print of the elevation now publishing in the shops, as pretty correct expositions of what Sir Robert Smirke is about to give to the nation in return for its good-humour and confidence for so many years, for the thousands he has had the disbursement of in the British Museum, we must turn our own backs upon him, and say we can keep his company no farther. We shall not expend any share of criticism upon it. The thing is wanting in dignity, in character, in every thing except the most effete and outwrought mannerism; a portico and pediment as of the end of something stuck at the side of something, and the whole hemmed in as if two neighbour proprietors had taken possession, or broken a compact that had enjoined an undisturbed ground vacancy upon which Sir Robert had relied for setting off his building. Then there is the best range of hooking-office or counting-house windows, disguised by a screen facade of columns.

Oh, such botching and patching! we have no words for it. *The Civil Engineer and Architect's Journal*, to the courtesy of whose conductor we are indebted for the Plan now used in illustration, has a long and strong article on the subject. *The Engineer, Architect, and Surveyor* devotes a portion of its space to it in the same spirit; the *Art Union*, as usual, is occupied with letters obnoxious; the *Albumen* exercises in the same strain; the *Spectator* and other general papers, as distinguished from these of the class, have entered on and discussed the matter in an anxious spirit; so that we are justified in speaking of the public feeling as we have done, and we are also justified, after what we have said on the topic in previous numbers, in resolving to carry into

effect what we had hoped would have been spared us, namely, the publication of Sir Robert's elevation as given out, and not contradicted by any counter-print, and another elevation embodying the views and principles which, taking all circumstances into account, and considering the integrity of the structure, we would submit, ought to be carried out.

It is in this way that we prefer to exercise our privilege of criticising and commenting on another's works. Something more than merely taking exceptions, or pointing out loose general principles of design, is required of us, and this we shall carry into effect, therefore, in No. 42. We propose to give these Designs in comparison, and to accompany them by such remarks at length, such an account of the whole matter pertaining to the Museum, and Sir Robert Smirke's connection with it, as will enable our readers to form a right estimate of the respective merits of both Designs, and in particular of Sir Robert's, and his conduct in the whole affair.

WESTMINSTER BRIDGE.

THE "Engineer, Architect, and Surveyor" of last month has an interesting engraving shewing Mr. Barry's proposal for Westminster Bridge, to bring it into harmony with his design for the "New Palace," as the Parliament Houses are now termed, and it also contains Messrs. Walker and Barges' and Mr. Barry's disquisitions in the shape of replies and reports. We shall present our readers with all they will require, to judge of this matter at an early stage, meanwhile we may content ourselves with saying that we cannot compliment either party upon their performances; if any thing, however, Messrs. Walker and Barges seem to have the best of it. Both revert to authorities, as if they were afraid to utter dicta of their own, when their reputation ought to be sufficient authority for any thing they may choose to hazard as of their own conviction,—otherwise they have badly aspired before and been unwisely trusted. In Mr. Barry's design for the bridge, there is somewhat too much of what we term "Wren's Gothic," and a solecism as regards the parapet, which, as coming from such a man, is inexcusable. The parapet of the bridge is made the exterior cornice, at least if we are not misled by the engraving. Mr. Barry is aiming at a flat, suppressed composition to break in with the "New Palace," and appears to us to be committing the same mistake as in the palace itself. The general expression is that of horizontality—long stretched and stratified lines—and only made into Gothic by elaborate details stamped on the surface as if to designate the

style, much after the fashion of the old painters who would append a label to their pictures, stating "This is a man," "This is a horse," and so on. There are some points of good thought in the bridge design, especially as regards the structure of the arch; the curvature of each limb of it being necessarily slight, he has thrown length into the piers, so as to compensate for the want of wedge form which a quicker curve would generate. The discussion as to the merit of a Gothic arch for a bridge appears hardly to have been turned on the right drift by either party; an arch for bridge traffic is exposed to very different strains to that of one covering in a door or window-opening in lieu of a finial, and the line of argument would vary accordingly: we think it does not so sufficiently in this case.

BUILDING MATERIALS—GRANITE.

WHAT so fitting as that, in approaching the subject of building materials, to be pursued through a series of articles, we should take up, as first in the division of building stone, that first and primary of the products of the rock and quarry—GRANITE? We will not lay down any arbitrary rule for the treatment of our subject, for we believe, if we were to do so, it would be less inviting to our readers than a sort of half-desultory, half-systematic mode; we believe that in giving our own, and inviting our readers' attention to these things, in the way in which they arise to attract it in the ordinary course of business, that the end of profitable information may be best answered. Men immersed in the active engagements of commercial and trading life cannot turn aside to engage in abstract or abstruse investigations, and we never knew of a practical people which did so. It was wisely ordered among the ancients, by that school of philosophers which obtained the name of the Peripatetic, that they should discourse of learning as they walked, and in this country, with equal fitness, men require to do so as they work, to lay their hands upon the material, and simultaneously, as it were, to discuss and acquaint themselves with its properties.

Neither shall we, in thus handling our subject, pursue a scholastic method, we shall rather aim at the reverse; we shall note or rectify the facts as we have them in active array before us, and then return, as it were, to inquire as to the rudiments. In treating of granite, for instance, we shall give a kind of *work day* review on the site of our labours, and select one particular species of the material to dwell upon, first, as to that which relates to it in ordinary and peculiar, and afterwards as to granite generally.

The granites of Aberdeenshire, including